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Historic Preservation Statement

KITTREDGE SQUARE SURVEY AND PLANNING AREA

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The Kittredge Square Survey and Planning Area is full of potential for historic and architectural preservation. The area is located between the historic center of Roxbury (John Eliot Square, with its imposing First Church of 1804) and the high ground of Highland Park (the site of a Revolutionary War fort, since 1869 crowned by an ornamental 130-foot water standpipe). Just outside the Kittredge Square area, toward Highland Park, is the William Lloyd Garrison House (125 Highland Street), a National Historic Landmark. Both topographically and architecturally, the area is interesting and varied. The ground slopes considerably, providing handsome views in several directions; on this land, well endowed with trees and other foliage, is a full cross section of suburban architecture of the period 1830-1900.

Historical Background

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Kittredge Square area was undeveloped agricultural upland. Centre Street existed as part of the road from Boston to Dedham and points south, but Highland Street and the various cross streets of the area were not laid out until the second quarter of the nineteenth century. In the summer of 1775, a fort was built at what is now Highland, Linwood, and Cedar Streets; this was the Roxbury Lower Fort, a companion to the High Fort (now Highland Park) in the chain of defenses that helped bring about the evacuation of the British from Boston.

The beginnings of suburbanization in the area occurred when Highland Street was laid out in 1825. Other streets followed in succeeding years, until by 1860 the present-day street pattern was virtually complete. In 1835, Alvah Kittredge (after whom Kittredge Square was named) purchased several large parcels of land, one of which included both sides of Cedar Street from Centre Street to Washington Street. The following year he built his columned Greek Revival mansion (now at 10 Linwood Street) on the old Lower Fort site. Kittredge was responsible for developing much of the area in the years from 1835 until he sold his mansion in 1866 (he died in 1876). The pattern of development during this period consisted of a gradual selling off of individual lots on which detached single or double houses were built, either by the original developer (such as Kittredge), by a builder on speculation, or by the new owner for his own use.

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Besides the Kittredge house (owned after 1871 by architect Nathaniel J. Bradlee), the other major Greek Revival mansion in the Kittredge Square area is the Edward Everett Hale house, originally fronting on Highland Street but now around the corner at 12 Morley Street. The Hale house was built in 1841 by a carpenter named Benjamin Kent; it came into Hale's ownership in 1869, on a considerably reduced parcel of land.

The easterly parts of Dorr, Millmont, Lambert, and Norfolk Streets were developed beginning in the 1830's by Nathaniel Dorr, who built the two stone houses on the parcel--21 Dorr Street (1830's) and 34 Lambert Street (ca. 1840), the latter his own residence. Other sections of the Kittredge Square area were developed in a similar way, so that by 1870 there was a scattering of buildings throughout the area. All were single or double houses, and nearly all were of frame construction. Their size and elaboration varied, and small and large houses were often built in close proximity, although the mansions were generally located on the largest or highest pieces of land. All the mid-nineteenth century styles are represented--Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Italianate, Mansard.

Row housing first appeared in the Kittredge Square area about 1870, and for a few years it dominated the building scene. Unlike the Back Bay, where most row houses were built for individual owners, the suburban row housing of Roxbury Highlands was built in blocks by developers and then sold off house by house. Some rows were elaborate, such as the brownstone block at 15-27 Highland Avenue (1873). Most were built of red brick, such as those on Morley Street (1872) or at 1-3 and 5-8 Kittredge Park (1871-1874). The row-house boom was a phenomenon of the early 1870's; subsequent development took the form of multiple-family housing types rather than single-family row houses. The frame three-decker became the most prevalent type in the 1880's and 1890's. The most dense and most urban development occurred at the turn of the century, when two estates on Kittredge Park were subdivided and built up with three-story brick tenements. This was when the Kittredge house was moved to its present position at 10 Linwood Street, and another Greek Revival house that originally fronted on Kittredge Park (9 Millmont Street) was all but enveloped.

By about 1900, the Kittredge Square area had reached its maximum density. More recent years have brought a reduction in intensity of land use, as vacant or unmaintainable buildings have been demolished. Through this process, more vacant lots exist now than in the late nineteenth century. The reasons for this situation are tied up with the decline of the neighborhood as a desirable place to live, despite its architectural and environmental assets. The original farming community became suburbanized in the mid-nineteenth century, reaching its high point of development around 1870. Fast, efficient streetcar service from Boston made this development possible, but extension of the service westward opened up outlying regions for settlement for those who wished to move on. The coming of the automobile in the twentieth century enormously increased the commuting range. The Kittredge Square area was passed by, occupied by successively poorer groups of people as their predecessors moved away. The next chapter of the area's history is about to be written, as urban renewal helps make inroads against the physical decline of the aging buildings. The architectural historian hopes that the best of these buildings will be respected and enhanced as the Kittredge Square area enters its next phase of development.

Major Landmarks

The two most important buildings in the Kittredge Square area, both meeting National Register Criteria of Evaluation for historic or architectural significance, are:

Alvah Kittredge House, 10 Linwood Street, 1836. A handsome Greek Revival columned mansion important both for its embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of its type and period and for its associations with the lives of two locally important persons--Alvah Kittredge, early developer of the area, and Nathaniel J. Bradlee, noted Boston architect. Although hemmed in by later buildings, the house occupies a key position visually on Kittredge Square, being clearly visible to anyone approaching the square on Highland Street.

Edward Everett Hale House, 12 Morley Street, 1841. Another fine Greek Revival mansion with columned front porch, embodying the distinctive characteristics of its type and period and associated with the life of an illustrious person--Boston minister and writer Edward Everett Hale.

Also an important landmark, though not a building, is:

Milestone, Centre Street (opposite No. 45), 1729. Marking the three-mile distance from Boston, this was one of a series of eighteenth-century milestones on the route to Dedham and points south. It is comparable to the nearby Parting Stone (1711) at the intersection of Centre and Roxbury Streets, already listed in the National Register as one of the 1767 milestones along the old Boston Post Road.

Other Buildings of Architectural Interest

While of less significance than the Kittredge and Hale houses, the following buildings in the Kittredge Square area embody the distinctive characteristics of their type, period, or method of construction and may also qualify for the National Register--either individually or collectively. They are all of more than ordinary architectural interest.

1-2-3 Alvah Kittredge Park (1871). Handsome group of three mansard-roofed brick row houses, specifically adapted to the corner site (the entrance to No. 1 is around the corner on Linwood Street). Alvah Kittredge Park, now unfortunately asphalt covered, was originally known as Highland Park, then (beginning around 1870) as Lewis Park. In the present century it was renamed after Kittredge, whose own house, mentioned above, faces the park at 10 Linwood Street.

140 Cedar Street (ca. 1890). Wodden three-decker of ample proportions and considerable style, in admirably original condition.

146 Cedar Street (ca. 1860). Imposing Italianate house with overhanging hip roof, wide corner quoins, and projecting front entry with round-arched door. Later asphalt siding does not obscure the original trim.

6-8 Centre Street (ca. 1860) Bow-fronted brick double house with mansard roof.

48 Centre Street (ca. 1840). Two-story Greek Revival house with full-height facade pilasters.

64 Centre Street (ca. 1840). Greek Revival cottage with one-story temple portico. Unusual pediment treatment.

21 Dorr Street (1830's). Small, hip-roofed stone house, built for and occupied by Captain Nathaniel Dorr, early developer of the surrounding blocks.

41 Dorr Street (ca. 1890). Well-preserved three-decker with round bay at the corner of Lambert Avenue.

15-27 Highland Avenue (1873). Row of seven high-stooped, mansard-roofed brownstones with angular bay windows. In derelict condition but still the most imposing row-house group in the area.

26-28 and 32-34 Highland Avenue (1859). Pair of originally identical double houses set back from the street on elevated grounds. Built at the same time by the same builder, both originally had cupolas; only 26-28 (which is in better condition) does now. The roofs are mansards cut off at either end, giving a gambrel profile.

38 Highland Avenue (ca. 1840). Greek Revival house with two-story pillared porches at either end and one-story pillared porch across the front.

3-5 Highland Street (ca. 1880). Brick double house with Queen Anne dormers and an oriel bay. Although the entrances are paired at the center in the standard double-house pattern, the two halves are not identical--No. 3 is somewhat larger and more ornate than No. 5.

74 Highland Street (ca. 1850). Wooden Italianate house with later brown shingle siding but retaining most of the original trim--entrance porch, dormers, bracketed cornice, round-arched windows.

82 Highland Street (ca. 1890). Bow-fronted brick Colonial Revival house, originally the left end of a three-house row (the other two houses have been demolished).

67 Lambert Avenue (ca. 1860). Frame house with a one-story front porch and a gambrel-like, cut-off mansard roof facing the street. The house is set unusually far back on a deep, narrow lot.

54 Linwood Street (ca. 1840). Greek Revival house with a boxed pediment and a one-story side porch. Faces Linwood Park, a small circular park in Linwood Street.

56 Linwood Street (ca. 1870). Elaborately detailed mansard cottage with corner tower. Faces Linwood Park at the corner of Centre Street.

29-31 Millmont Street (ca. 1870). Brick double house with one-story front porch, high mansard roof, and segmental-arched window lintels.

39 Millmont Street (ca. 1910). Well-preserved twentieth-century three-decker with front and back porches for all three flats.

Groups of Buildings of Architectural and Environmental Interest

In addition to a grouping on Highland Avenue formed by several buildings mentioned above (15-27, 26-28, 32-34, and 38 Highland Avenue), the Kittredge Square area contains two groups of buildings of considerable architectural and environmental interest. In these groupings, the architectural quality of the individual buildings is less important than the combined environmental effect.

Linwood Square. A cul-de-sac extending north off Linwood Street. Bounded on the east by a group of seven brick row houses (2-14 Linwood Square), on the west by a double house (25-27 Linwood Street) and four mansard cottages (5, 7, 9, and 13 Linwood Square). The street narrows at the end and turns into a dirt path leading down the hill to the intersection of Centre Street and Highland Avenue. The final house on the west has an extravagant tower that takes advantage of the commanding view of the Boston skyline.

Morley Street. A cul-de-sac extending northwest off Highland Street. Beyond the Edward Everett Hale house at 12 Morley Street, two groups of brick row houses (both built in 1872) face each other at an angle across a triangular open space (now part of the street but potentially a pedestrian courtyard). The ground drops off beyond, providing views (as at the end of Linwood Square) of downtown Boston.

Conclusion

Major landmarks, buildings of architectural interest, even groups of buildings of architectural and environmental interest do not tell the whole preservation story for the Kittredge Square area. There are a number of lesser buildings that make an important environmental contribution, and many of the area's badly maintained buildings could be rehabilitated to bring back their original style and character. Furthermore, the various parcels of vacant land offer the possibility of new construction that respects and enhances existing historic assets. In sum, Kittredge Square has the potential for broadly based preservation activity that, coupled with conventional rehabilitation efforts, could enormously enhance the physical appearance of the area. There is no reason why the future of Kittredge Square should not be as varied and interesting as its past.







